



Good Practice Story Title: A new model of conservation and sustainable development for Chile: The experience of Parque Andino Juncal

Destination: Parque Andino Juncal

Country: Chile

Submitting Organization: Programa Territorial Integrado Turismo PTI Turismo de Intereses Especiales Valle del Aconcagua

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description: The Juncal Andean Park is a private protected area located in the Aconcagua Valley, Valparaiso Region, Chile. The property includes elevations ranging from 2,200 to over 5,000 meters above sea level, with unique natural features, enormous beauty and easy access to the Juncal Glacier and surrounding mountains. There are numerous estuaries, wetlands, ice and rock glaciers, and a wide range of native and endemic species of flora and fauna, particular to the Mediterranean climate.

The property has been in the Kenrick family since 1911. In 2003, the decision was made not to allow the development of industrial activities such as mining or hydropower on the property and to actively prevent any attempts to do so. In the Juncal Valley the land, water and ice will have the opportunity to rest, recover, and flourish.



In May 2010, the Juncal Andean Park was designated a site of international importance by the Ramsar Convention. We are proud to be Chile's 12th Ramsar site, the 1909th in the world, the first and only one in the Central Andes and the first private conservation site in all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Summary of Good Practice Story: This Private Protected Area has belonged to the Kenrick family since 1911, and is currently the Kenrick Lyon Community. Parque Andino Juncal is managed by Catherine Kenrick, who has been its main driving force. In 2003, the family, with the help of volunteers and friends, began a process of protecting the property and making it a Private Protected Area (PPA), with the aim of protecting the ecological heritage and ensuring the sustainability of the activities carried out there.

Since we began actively caring for the property, we have observed the recovery and expansion of flora and fauna coverage throughout the territory. We have witnessed the presence of guanacos and pumas, unprecedented in recent times, and a noticeable increase in vegetation, grasses and plants, especially in the valleys and hillsides. Scientific research and observations by visitors will continue to be vital in this work.

In addition, the property is undoubtedly cleaner. This is due to two types of interventions. One, the constant work of the Park administration and of visitors who are aware of the Leave No Trace policy, of taking all their trash with them and picking up the trash they find. Two, decades of military maneuvers related to the conflict with Argentina in 1978, and years of military training maneuvers in the valley, left many holes in the ground filled with trash and ammunition casings. In recent years, members of the Río Blanco Mountain School have collaborated in the collection and removal of this accumulated institutional trash.

Due to its unique natural characteristics, its unparalleled beauty and the easy access it offers to the Juncal Glacier and surrounding mountains, the area has been of great interest to generations of muleteers, miners, soldiers, railway workers, mountaineers, and more recently, hikers. A rich social history of the culture of the mountain range has been created. Unfortunately, the negative impact it has suffered as a result of careless behavior by visitors in the past is significant, but today it is being corrected and repaired.





Among the measures adopted is the presence of park rangers, who recommend and monitor compliance with low-impact rules of conduct and give talks on environmental education and safety to visitors.

We work to ensure that the present and future of the basin is different from that of the past. The vast majority of the mountain valleys in the Aconcagua Valley are marked by the presence of roads and trucks, drilling, remains, not to mention the tunnels or open pits of mining exploitation, or the use and contamination of water resources. The Juncal River basin is mostly free of interventions and this has been achieved thanks to the collaborative work with the local community and all those visitors who understand the importance of ecosystem conservation.

Issues faced: Among the main threats that have been faced are mining, speculation on water resources, unauthorized cattle ranching, tourism in unauthorized areas, hunting, among others. In Chile, there is still no legal backing for Private Protected Areas that would allow their proper protection with legal certainty.

In March 2024, a conflict escalated in Parque Andino Juncal. This, after it was announced that the North American mining company Nutrex SPA requested the support of law enforcement to enter the park, which has been repeatedly denied by its administrators and neighbors in the area.

Nutrex SPA acquired mining concessions that it seeks to explore within the park, which correspond to 8,300 hectares of the 13,796 that the park has and which are mostly glacial areas. The mining company seeks to begin marking 15 points which would irreparably affect the fauna, flora and water resources of the park.

On March 25, 2024, the 1st Court of Los Andes commune approved the mining company's request, which is based on the Chilean Mining Code, which allows mining companies to appeal in cases where private landowners oppose the entry of third parties. The court ruling establishes that the claims of the family that owns the park and those who manage it only correspond to those of surface owners, so there is no reason to reject Nutrex SPA's application.



In Chile, mining concessions are considered a right that is distinct and independent from surface ownership. In other words, the owner of surface land is not the owner of its subsoil. This invites us to reflect on the policies and laws that have governed Chile for decades regarding mining exploitation, the right to property and environmental protection, since there are legal loopholes that prevent owners from protecting their land from industrial activities such as mining or hydroelectricity.

Solution: It is essential to highlight the importance of preserving the Juncal Andean Park, which was declared a RAMSAR site in 2010, that is, a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, as it has at least six wetlands with pristine water and is home to 15% of the glaciers in the Aconcagua Valley, which corresponds to 1,400 hectares of glacial surface, which contribute up to 67% of the flow of the main rivers in the Valparaíso Region in the summer and low rainfall periods. Therefore, the park represents a significant and strategic water reserve for Chile's largest tourist destination. In addition, it is an important tourist attraction, as this territory is home to one of the best-known glaciers in the region, the Juncal Norte glacier, which, thanks to its easy access, is an unmissable route for adventurers and nature lovers.

The petition by the North American mining company Nutrex SPA alerted the regional authorities, who sought to stop the invasive mining intervention due to the importance of the park. This is why the governor of the Valparaíso region, Rodrigo Mundaca, visited the park, where he indicated that the commitment to the environmental cause, the commitment to the protection of Parque Andino Juncal, is a commitment that has today become an ethical imperative and a moral imperative.

Thanks to the active work of environmental organizations, political authorities and members of the local community, the activities of Minero Norte Americana Nutrex SPA were cancelled and thus, in the near future, a major conservation figure could be achieved: converting the Parque Andino Juncal into a Nature Sanctuary, which would mean full legal support.



Methods, Steps, and Tools applied: There is no legislation in Chile that protects the decision of landowners to keep their property free from industrial activities such as mining or hydroelectricity. This translates into the need to work continuously with lawyers, local authorities and companies, community members and a network of national and international conservationists to ensure the conservation of the property and the area and to extend the conservation area to include all 220 km² of the Juncal River basin.

The Kenrick Family, administrators of the Parque Andino Juncal, believe that we should not limit ourselves to just “consuming” nature, we are an integral part of it: let us take care of it, enjoy the beauty of its landscapes, let us be inspired by it at every moment. Nature is our best friend, it heals us and transforms us.

Parque Andino Juncal is not an ecotourism operation. The main mission is to protect the valley, and protect the integrity of the ecosystem of the basin. The development of sustainable tourism is a real way to achieve conservation.

We believe that keeping the property open to the public is vital for its future conservation. Parque Andino Juncal depends on visitors to care for it and to help keep it pristine; and we depend on a growing group of volunteers who contribute with their work to the development of the Park's infrastructure.

Achievements and Results: There are five important wetlands in Juncal, mainly located in the Juncal Valley: Vega la Roca, Vegas la Paz, Vegas de Nacimiento; Cajón de Mardones: Vega las Mardones and the Cajón de Navarro: Vegas las Canchitas.

Wetlands are a focus of conservation due to their vital importance as a source of life for flora and fauna, especially in wild environments such as Juncal.

These high Andean wetlands are home to bird species and provide water sources for mammals such as the guanaco and the vizcacha.

The park is observing an increasing return of species, from birds to key fauna such as guanacos, and an increase in the area and density of vegetation in the wetlands.



There are at least 45 species of birds, 68 species of flora, 10 mammals, five species of reptiles, and two species of toad.

This diversity is even more valuable because 93 percent of the flora and 98 percent of the fauna is native. Seven species of flora and five species of fauna are endemic.

The property consists of 13,796 hectares whose borders are to the North, an imaginary line that passes through the axis of the Barros Negros Creek and following the stone wall joins the Juncal River with the Bermejo Pass. To the East, the border with the Argentine Republic. To the South, an imaginary line that runs through the Estero de los Monos de Agua and then the Quebrada de los Monos de Agua until it meets the border with the Argentine Republic and to the West, the Juncal River.

Parque Andino Juncal represents two-thirds of the Juncal River basin, and is at the foot of the Juncal Glacier. The property is home to approximately 24 glaciers, at least six important wetlands, and numerous pristine water sources. For these reasons, in 2010 it was granted Ramsar protection status, the international protocol for the protection of wetlands.

Lessons Learned and Advice: Considering the current socio-environmental crisis, human well-being urgently depends on complex awareness and decision-making in integrated and diverse systems.

In the Aconcagua Valley, during 2023-2024, regional authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to the conservation of the Juncal Andean Park, a valuable natural and tourist asset.

During the recent events regarding the mining operation in the park, the strategy to convert it into a Nature Sanctuary was discussed, with the aim of protecting its resources, including water sources and glaciers, which are crucial for the Valley and the Valparaíso Region. This initiative is supported by the local community, environmental organizations and government departments.



Ecotourism is seen as a key solution to develop economic, social and environmental sustainability in the park. This responsible tourism model will not only boost the local economy, but will also promote the preservation of the natural environment by encouraging visitors to value and protect the park.

Parque Andino Juncal has a long history of receiving tourists from all over the world throughout the year. The park sustains its operations thanks to a strong network of volunteers, park rangers, and a pre-booking system that allows for control of carrying capacity, ensuring a sustainable and low-environmental-impact experience.

The official declaration of the park as a Nature Sanctuary is expected to help prevent mining exploitation that could cause irreparable damage to the habitat. Collaboration between authorities and the community has proven effective, as evidenced by the cancellation of previous mining activities.

This collaborative approach will be essential to ensure the long-term protection of the park and position it as the destination's greatest natural tourist attraction. Ecotourism and the commitment of all involved has been fundamental to turning this vision into reality, ensuring that the Parque Andino Juncal continues to be a protected treasure for future generations.

The recent conflict in Parque Andino Juncal with mining companies, demonstrated the value of collaboration and community work by various actors present in the Aconcagua Valley, both public and private, even from other regions of the country, managing to stop the threat that the North American mining company Nutrex Spa could generate in this area of high socio-ecological value

Considering also that 84% of the biodiversity of rivers in Chile has decreased and 80% of the wetland surface has been lost. This situation makes evident the need to work for water security and water supply, thus protecting diversity of habitats, which generate food sources, climate regulation and flood control.



Given the current water crisis scenario, it is essential to evaluate by the State how to prioritize water resources versus mining resources throughout Chile. Water systems are those that allow life to develop, considering, therefore, that the availability of water today cannot be affected by a mining concession for exploration or exploitation of the substances that the constitutional organic law declares concessionable. Given the above, there is an urgent need to evaluate the legal loopholes that today give rise to continuing to promote the water scarcity that Chile faces.

Recognitions and Additional References:

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